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WEST DESERT

Museum's photo exhibit shows a surprising amount of beauty in Utah's most desolate area

BY PARRY D. SORENSEN

Until the government began talking about basing MX missiles in Utah's West Desert, Craig Denton hadn't thought too much about that part of the state.

"Like others, I had previously dismissed the West Desert as a wasteland," says Denton, an associate professor of communication at the University of Utah.

The missile proposal piqued his interest in the Lake Bonneville Basin, which covers a good portion of the state. Its north and west boundaries are the Idaho and Nevada state lines. On the east side it's the Wasatch range, and the southern edge is around Milford.

Denton's interest in the basin grew into a three-year study of the area, the results of which can be seen in a photo exhibit at the Museum of Natural History on the University campus.

"This exhibit is especially timely," says Donald V. Hague, museum director. "It introduces people to unexpected beauty in an area that is now coming to public attention because of huge developments that might be placed there, like the supercollider proton accelerator."

The collection of 66 superb photographs in both black and white and color are a sampling of over 400 pictures Denton has taken over the past three years. All were taken with a 4X5 field camera mounted on a tripod, often set up on uneven terrain.

Along with the photos, Denton has written a small paperback monograph about the history, geology and geography of the area, plus descriptions of the locations he explored and photographed.

Copies are free to all who visit the exhibit.

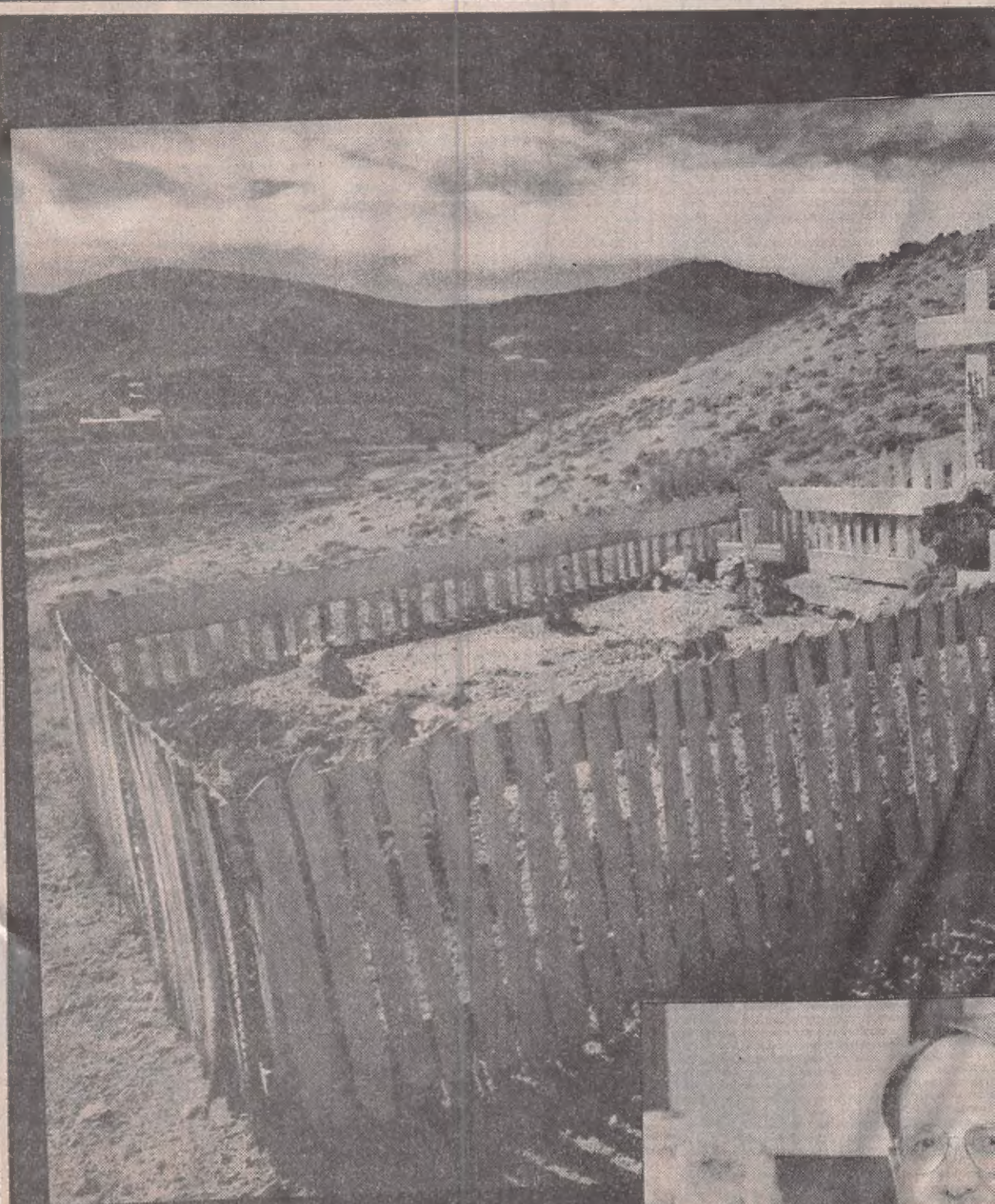
An outline map in the booklet shows the location of 19 mountain ranges in the basin, plus three large lakes — the Great Salt Lake, Utah Lake and Sevier Lake.

For a desolate area, the West Desert has attracted a surprising amount of attention over the years, the most current being the supercollider project. Others uses, built or considered, have included the "racetrack" system for the MX missile, a hazardous waste disposal site, coal-fired power plant, nerve gas storage and disposal sites, the Great Salt Lake pumping station and solar energy development. Other issues involve proposed wilderness areas there, and the creation of the new Great Basin National Park.

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THE GOLD HILL CEMETERY, NORTH OF THE DEEP CREEK MOUNTAINS NEAR THE UTAH-NEVADA BORDER, WAS PHOTOGRAPHED BY CRAIG DENTON AS PART OF A THREE-YEAR STUDY. DENTON, AT RIGHT, HAS HIS PHOTOS ON EXHIBIT AT UTAH MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY.

